



Stichting Zelfbeschikking West-Sahara

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De Stichting Zelfbeschikking West-Sahara voert campagne om het Saharaanse volk in staat te stellen zijn onvervreemdbare recht op zelfbeschikking uit te oefenen. Het Internationale Gerechtshof in Den Haag kwam in 1975 tot de uitspraak dat het volk van de toenmalige Spaanse Sahara in de gelegenheid gesteld moet worden zelf over zijn staatkundige toekomst te beslissen. De Marokkaanse invasie en daarop volgende bezetting heeft de Saharanen dit recht al meer dan 25 jaar onzegd.

Nieuwsbrief West-Sahara nr 2 – februari 2003 (deel 1)

In juni 2002 werd het initiatief genomen om een nieuwe organisatie in Nederland op te richten om het volk van de Westelijke Sahara te steunen. Nu is de Stichting Zelfbeschikking West-Sahara een feit, en kunnen de activiteiten echt van start gaan. Van het Solidariteitsfonds XminY krijgt de Stichting een bescheiden subsidie voor de productie van informatiemateriaal en voor deelname aan de internationale adoptiecampagne ten behoeve van de honderden Saharanen die sedert de Marokkaanse invasie zijn “verdwenen”.

In augustus 2002 werd een eerste elektronische Nieuwsbrief gemaakt. Hier is dan eindelijk het tweede nummer – dat door de lange periode die zij bestrijkt helaas erg omvangrijk is. Er is ook veel gebeurd dat niet onvermeld mag blijven. Het ligt in de bedoeling nu regelmatiger informatie te verstrekken over activiteiten en campagnes in Nederland en over nieuws in en rond de Westelijke Sahara.

Nieuwsitems en analyses worden voorlopig overgenomen van *Sahara Analysis*, de nieuwsbrief die maandelijks wordt uitgebracht door de Western Sahara Campaign in Groot-Brittannië. Onder het kopje *Nieuwsbrief West-Sahara* vindt u berichten over aktiviteiten, meningen en publicaties in Nederland over de West-Sahara.

Nieuwe abonnees kunnen zich op bovenstaand e-mail adres opgeven voor toezending. Giften ter ondersteuning van de activiteiten van de Stichting zijn welkom.

Voor meer informatie: schrijf, bel of mail ons.

“Nederland steunt VN”

In september stuurde de Stichting een open brief aan de minister van Buitenlandse Zaken, naar aanleiding van een hongerstaking die door 141 Saharaanse gevangenen in de gevangenis van El Ayoun, de bezette hoofdstad van de West-Sahara. In de aanloop naar de Marokkaanse parlementsverkiezingen verscherpte de repressie tegen Saharaanse mensenrechtenactivisten in door Marokko bezet gebied van de West-Sahara. Huiszoeken, arrestaties, politieke processen en absurde veroordelingen waren aan de orde van de dag.

De Stichting riep de Nederlandse Regering, de politieke partijen en de Tweede Kamer op:

- met kracht te protesteren bij de Marokkaanse regering tegen de voortdurende schendingen van de rechten van het Saharaanse volk;
- binnen de Verenigde Naties erop aan te dringen te verplichtingen jegens dit volk na te komen door nu op korte termijn een vrij, rechtvaardig en onpartijdig zelfbeschikkingsreferendum in de West-Sahara te houden.

Bij wijze van antwoord schreef het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, bij monde van het plaatsvervangend hoofd van de afdeling Noord-Afrika: “*De Nederlandse regering steunt de VN in haar pogingen tot een vreedzame oplossing te komen van het conflict rond de Westelijke Sahara. Vanuit de EU is meermaals steun uitgesproken voor de activiteiten van de Persoonlijk Vertegenwoordiger van de Secretaris Generaal van de Verenigde Naties James Baker. U kunt verzekerd zijn van blijvende ondersteuning door Nederland van de inspanningen van de VN om een vreedzame en voor alle partijen acceptabele oplossing te bewerkstelligen.*”

De vraag is alleen hoe lang nog de Nederlandse regering blijft accepteren dat een van de partijen, namelijk Marokko, de enig aangewezen oplossing voor uitoefening van het recht op zelfbeschikking – een referendum - systematisch blijft blokkeren.

Politieke partijen steunen recht op zelfbeschikking

In november en in december vonden er bijeenkomsten plaats met de werkgroep Buitenland van respectievelijk Groen Links en van Democraten '66. Beide partijen spraken hun steun uit voor het recht op zelfbeschikking en verklaarden zich bereid samen te werken met de Stichting en met het Front Polisario om dit doel te helpen bereiken.

Eind oktober 2002: 28^{ste} EUCOCO in Modena

Meer dan 300 afgevaardigden uit 18 landen namen deel aan de 28ste Europese Conferentie voor Coördinatie van de steun aan het Saharaanse volk. Aan deze conferentie, die jaarlijks door een ander Europees steunkomitee georganiseerd wordt, namen vanuit Nederland 2 juristen van de Internationale Associatie van Juristen voor West-Sahara en 2 leden van de Stichting Zelfbeschikking West-Sahara deel.

De slotresolutie van de conferentie is te vinden op www.arso.org.

News

Human Rights – mixed fortunes in Morocco's courts

Tamek: appeal turned down despite support from Amnesty International

Ali Salem Tamek, member of the national council of the Truth & Justice Forum and of the Sahara Section office, has had his appeal turned down and sentence of 10,000 Dirhams fine (about the average annual income in Morocco) and 2 years' imprisonment confirmed by the Appeal court of Agadir. The court upheld the verdict of the magistrate's court, that he was guilty of "threatening the security of the state", despite the only evidence being statements extracted under torture from three other Saharawi prisoners, since released. Tamek, arrested on the 26th August in Rabat, was initially sentenced on 10th September by the magistrate's court in Agadir.

Eddymaoui: freed and acquitted in El Ayoun

Abdessalam Eddymaoui, accused of the "crime" of having organised demonstrations in Smara in November 2001, was freed and acquitted by the El Ayoun court on 16th October. Observers appointed by human rights organisations and a foreign journalist were present at the trial. Eddymaoui, a member of the persecuted Sahara Section of the Truth & Justice Forum, spoke of his work in exposing human rights abuses ranging from unfair dismissal to "throwing of Saharawis out of helicopters by the Moroccan army". (arso/BIRDHSO)

Mohammed Daddach receives “Nobel price for human rights”

Article 13 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

- 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.*
- 2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including their own, and return to their own country.*

Almost exactly a year since he was released after spending 22 years as a prisoner of conscience, Mohamed Sidi Daddach is due in Norway, November 3rd, to receive the Rafto Foundation Prize for Human Rights. What is more heartwarming than this, a man who has quite literally spent half his life in prison for his belief in the democratic rights of his people, being honoured at last for his courageous and principled struggle?

But as he is a Saharawi living under Moroccan rule, it's not that easy. Freed from prison, he is not truly free: despite many requests, he has not been allowed a passport, without which he cannot travel abroad. When he was originally captured by the Moroccan army all those long years ago, it was while he was attempting to flee the Moroccan occupation and join his family in the refugee camps. A year after being out of prison, he has still not been able to travel to see them. He has been under constant surveillance since his release. His friends and associates have come to know well the inside of various police stations and detention centres as they are regularly hauled in for questioning about the Saharawi human rights movement.

Meanwhile, the weekend before he left for Norway, four young Saharawis were arrested and tortured by the army for the same reason as Daddach in 1979: trying to flee across the “berm” – or the “wall of shame”, as Saharawi activists have called it – to go and live in the refugee camps. They are reported to be detained in the prison at El Ayoun, awaiting trial. One wonders what they will be charged with: “attempting to put into practice Article 13(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”?

Morocco has a long history of denying Saharawi people their freedom to travel abroad. Their strategies for isolating the population of the occupied territories, and keeping them hidden from the rest of the world, range from simply refusing to provide passports, to stopping people at the airport minutes before their plane is due to leave. For example, it was in this latter manner that Brahim Noumriah was prevented from attending the UN Commission on Human Rights hearings in Geneva in 2001. The Truth & Justice Forum campaigner Abdel-Salem Tamek, recently condemned to 2 years’ imprisonment, has never been able to obtain a passport. The same for Aminatou Hidar, who was imprisoned from 1987 to 1991.

The Moroccan regime also practices internal exile and house arrest on Saharawis who refuse to be intimidated into silence. Roukaibi Sidi Mohamed has now spent 10 years under house arrest in Akka, Southern Morocco, unable to see his family. This house arrest is not the result of any legal process: interestingly, when a judge in El Ayoun sentenced Saharawi unemployed activists to internal exile recently, the appeal court overturned the verdict.

It is particularly fitting that it is the Rafto prize involved. Much of Theodor Rafto’s human rights work was concerned with the Eastern bloc countries in the 1970s. They were notorious for not permitting freedom of movement to dissidents, or indeed any citizen at all. .

See also: <http://www.rafto.no/eng/raftosymposium/>

Daddach in Norway: “out of prison” at last – and meets his mother for first time in 27 years

At the last minute, after top-level intervention by the Norwegian government, Saharawi human rights activist and ex-prisoner of conscience Sidi Mohamed Daddach was able to leave Moroccan-ruled territory for the first time in his life, in order to receive the Rafto Foundation

Human Rights Prize in Bergen, Norway on Sunday 3rd November. He was sentenced to death in 1980 for attempting to leave Western Sahara and, even after his release last year, was still not granted a passport. He attended the ceremony in Bergen, and had a full programme of meetings with journalists, officials of various organisations, the Norwegian prime minister – and his mother, who he had not seen since she fled the Moroccan invasion of Western Sahara 27 years ago.

"More Saharawi mothers should be given a chance to experience this."

Daddach's mother, Enguia Bakay Lahbib, lives in the Dakhla refugee camp in the Algerian desert. She was asked whether she wanted to come to Norway to see her son. The 89-year-old had no doubts; this could have been her last chance. On Thursday, Ms Lahbib received an Algerian passport. On Friday, she had a Norwegian visa. On Saturday, she obtained a ticket that was going to airlift her Tindouf - Alger - Lyon - Amsterdam - Bergen on her first-ever trip outside the Sahara. Saturday evening, she arrived at Bergen airport, received by her son and the press corps as the Queen of Sahara. Tears were flowing.

"On Death Row you smile in the daytime" – Daddach speaks in Norway

"On death row one smiles during the day. During the day, you understand that you have survived just another day. In the evening, the smile disappears. That is the time for executions and you never know if you are next in line." But after 24 years in prison, the outside world brought its own challenges and disorientations: "I saw grown-up people who I last had seen when they still were babies. I came back in the same way a dead person comes back to life."

But Mr Daddach does not rest on his achievements. He remains involved in human rights campaigning on a daily basis, and has a clear political analysis of the political struggle that has dominated his life. "The permanent state of abuse that we suffer at the hands of the Moroccan forces in Western Sahara will remain so until the full application of the UN settlement plan. For us, there is no alternative to the referendum."

(*Daddach stories: Sahara-Update; Afrol news: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Sahara-Update/message/1004> to 1007*)

Tamek & Ahmed: Hunger Strikes

Imprisoned human rights activist Ali-Salem Tamek launched a hunger strike in protest at the conditions of his detention. He has now suspended it, after 11 days, following a meeting with the governor of Inzegane prison who promised to investigate his grievances. In Rabat, Saharawi students staged a sit-in in support of Tamek in front of the Ministry of Justice. Meanwhile, Nassiri Ahmed has begun a hunger strike in protest at the second postponement of his trial due to lack of witnesses: he believes these postponements are deliberately engineered to prolong his detention, which would otherwise be illegal.

See also Saharawi Human Rights Defenders' statement:

<http://www.arso.org/DDHS061102.htm>

Mohamed VI says "No"

King Mohamed VI recently described the referendum on Saharawi self-determination, which lies at the heart of the UN peace plan and recent UN Security Council resolutions, as "null" and "inapplicable". This latest burst of nay-saying took place on November 6th, the 27th Anniversary of the "Green March" (the civilian PR stunt which preceded Morocco's military invasion of Western Sahara in 1975).

Commenting on the speech, Mohamed Sidati, Minister-Counsellor of the National Leadership of the POLISARIO Front said that "this indicates the lack of political will on Morocco's part

to really work for a peaceful outcome in conformity with International Law”, and described the King’s interpretations of UN resolutions as “strange and tendentious.... Resolution 1429 [July 2002] ... does not make any mention at any moment of the ‘third way’, to which Morocco is desperately clinging”. He concluded that “the arguments contained in the royal speech seek to extol a colonial operation ... these theses prolong the already long suffering of the Saharawi people and preserve instability and insecurity in the Maghreb region”.

News

Oil: Norwegian survey company shedding shareholders

TGS-NOPEC, the Norwegian seismic survey company hired by Kerr-McGee and TotalFinaElf to survey Western Sahara’s waters for oil reserves, has attempted to justify its involvement in the controversial project in the face of a wave of shareholder divestment. In its statement, the company said that “TGS-NOPEC’s field operations are approximately 90% complete” – showing that it has burned its boats, so to speak. The statement also says that TGS “intends to fulfill its contractual obligations” and that it “has no agreement to participate in, or profit from ... any production or exploitation of mineral resources of the area”.

Pension funds, businesses and local authorities are among those unconvinced, and have been selling their shares following the circulation of an open letter to all shareholders from the Norwegian Support Committee for Western Sahara, calling on TGS-NOPEC to pull out of Western Sahara. Anyone else who cannot understand how providing the maps to the oil companies does not count as participating in oil exploitation is invited to contact Arne Helland, CFO, TGS-NOPEC, Tel.: +47-31-29-20-00 / +47-91-88-78-29, e-mail: arne@tgsonopec.no

Nassiri Ahmed: his long-delayed trial turns out to be a farce (arso, AFP)

Nassiri Ahmed, member of the Sahara Section of the Truth & Justice Forum, has been sentenced to 18 months imprisonment for being an instigator of the rioting which took place in Smara in November last year, despite all witnesses in the trial testifying that he was innocent of all charges. Prosecution witnesses disassociated themselves from police claims that they could prove Mr Ahmed’s guilt, and instead testified that they knew of no links between him and the disturbances. The trial had been postponed several times, during which time Mr Ahmed remained in custody – he was arrested in June this year, having gone to a police station in Rabat to renew his identity card, just after having attended the first Annual Meeting of the Truth & Justice Forum National Council. It seems evident now that these postponements to the trial were a means to keep him detained while the state security services searched frantically for anyone who would be prepared to back up their lies in court. But after several months of fruitless effort, they appear to have decided that basing a criminal conviction on evidence is an out-of-date concept in Mohamed VI’s modernised Morocco, and the judge obliged by sentencing Mr Ahmed on no grounds at all.

Truth & Justice Forum supports its activists (As-Sabah, Algeria; ARSO)

The National Executive of the Truth & Justice Forum has criticised the actions of the security services against two members of the National Council, and also highlighted a campaign by the secret services to force certain members of the Forum to apply to the state Consultative Commission on Human Rights for compensation.

The Commission, initially touted by the government as proof that the Moroccan state was willing to take responsibility for past human rights abuses, is now regarded with some scepticism. It is true that it has paid out some compensation to former political prisoners –

providing welcome recognition of their suffering and some sort of recompense. But, in the words of the US State Department “many still view the process as flawed administratively and favoring the Government”, as it “lacks transparency, ...independence, and ... the appeals procedures are inadequate”. Further, there are no investigations or prosecutions of those responsible for human rights abuses. The Moroccan security services still appear to be immune from justice.

Overview: “From this prison only martyrs will come out”

Two shocking stories of torture in El Ayoun prison that have come to light this week are just the latest in a long history of suffering that has led the institution to be labelled “el carcel negra”, the “black prison”.

Murdered in prison

Boucetta Mohamed Barka (DNI 59210 HS), also known as Chaybani, died aged 35 in the prison on Thursday November 28, 2002. According to statements from members of his family, his body, which was still handcuffed when they came to pick it up, showed marks of torture, multiple hematoma and burns. On a family visit two days previously, while in good health, he had alleged that he was tortured on a daily basis. He had been sentenced on November 12, 2002 to 8 months of imprisonment for a minor offence. The family filed a complaint to the King's Prosecutor at El Ayoun magistrate's court on Friday November 29, 2002, calling on it to take all necessary measures regarding this crime.

“SOS. Our condition is horrible, it is killing us.”

A letter from an anonymous Saharawi prisoner smuggled out to a delegation from the French human rights organisation France-Libertés, who visited the occupied territories of Western Sahara at the beginning of November, gives an eyewitness account of these events from one of those arrested. The letter, headed “The circumstances of our imprisonment”, details beatings, threats of rape and other mistreatments meted out to the author and four others, and alleges that they were tortured into signing confessions which stated that they started the police station fire. It appears that they still – 2 months later – have neither been tried or even had access to a lawyer.

The scene then moves to the prison. A nightmarish description of extreme overcrowding and lack of sanitation – over 90 people spending 22 hours of every day in a 25 by 13 foot cell, where “everything is filthy” – concludes with an appeal for visitors “to come and witness our sad situation”, as otherwise “from this prison only martyrs will come out”.

Shocking as these stories are, they should not be surprising. There have been numerous hunger strikes by Saharawi prisoners in protest at the appalling conditions inside this prison. The incarceration of anybody in such conditions is unacceptable: its use against human rights activists, without fair trial (or for lengthy periods without any sort of trial), is clearly a political act. In a statement released to mark the 27th anniversary of the Madrid Accords, the Collective of Saharawi Human Rights Defenders called on international help to get Morocco to “respect of the Geneva convention on the protection of the civil population during armed conflicts”. With both the prison and MINURSO HQ in El Ayoun, is it unreasonable to expect the UN to play an active role in such protection?

See: “The conditions of our imprisonment” letter in full:

<http://www.wsahara.net/02/letterdetained.html>

Saharawi Human Rights Defenders statement: <http://www.wsahara.net/02/shrd111402.html>

AFAPREDESA report (Spanish):

http://usuarios.lycos.es/afapredesa/informes/info_carcelnegra_11_07_02.htm

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NEWS

Protests; 400 on Hunger Strike

To mark the occasion of the 54th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights over 400 prisoners of El Ayoun took part in a hunger strike in protest against the conditions of their confinement and the 'assassination' of Mohamed Boucetta. The "Marrakech group" of former political prisoners will begin a protest in front of the Ministry for Human Rights during Christmas week. The protest will be followed by an indefinite hunger strike. (Bayane al-youn (SPS))

Aid during Ramadan

ECHO, the humanitarian office of the European Commission, in coordination with NGOs Caritas and Oxfam Belgique, provided dates, fresh meats, vegetables and oranges to the Saharawi refugees during the time of Ramadan. The Saharawi Red Crescent (CRS) expressed its satisfaction with the humanitarian assistance given, and a statement acknowledged that the aid given falls within ECHO's global plan for the year 2002. (Arso)

Write to Tamek

An appeal from the city of El Ayoun expresses thanks to supporters for their commitment to the defence of human rights in Western Sahara and asks for further help in confronting the daily oppression suffered by human rights defenders in the occupied territories. Such fierce attacks by the Moroccan authorities, writes the author, aim to dissolve the Sahara branch of the Forum for Truth and Justice. The appeal asks for letters to be sent to the Saharawi political prisoners in Moroccan jails, and gives the address of one of the most prominent:
Ali-Salem Tamek, No d'écrou 86401, Hay M No 01 ch 43, Prison de Salé, Rabat
- MOROCCO

Baker to unveil new proposals (BBC, EFE, Reuters, SPS)

James Baker will tour North-West Africa between 14th - 17th January, and is said to be bringing new proposals aimed at breaking the stalemate in the Western Sahara peace process. Exact details of his itinerary are not yet available, but it is believed that, in addition to meeting the leaderships of the POLISARIO Front and Morocco, he will be visiting Mauritania and Algeria. The content of the new proposals is also under wraps, but it is reported that the "partition option" has been discounted. In a new year statement, the National Secretariat of the POLISARIO Front called on Mr Baker to use this visit to set a new date for the referendum, and welcomed the award of the Rafto Foundation Human Rights prize to Mohamed Daddach. They also called on France to adopt a policy of "real neutrality" in North Africa; warned against MINURSO becoming an instrument of Morocco's occupation; condemned political repression in the Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara; and expressed concern with the shortfall in humanitarian aid for the refugee camps.

Moroccan - Saharawi dialogue in France (AFAPREDESA, ARSO)

While there is no face-to-face dialogue at governmental level, Saharawis and Moroccans in France have been organising their own meetings to discuss the Western Sahara. Most recently, the Limoges branch of "Convergence of Moroccan Democrats Abroad" held a meeting with guest speakers from the Saharawi human rights organisation AFAPREDESA, the POLISARIO Front, and a French pro-Saharawi activist. The text of "Lettre à mon frère Marocain" (Letter to my Moroccan brother) by the late Fadel Ismail, formerly POLISARIO

representative in the UK and France, is now available online in French:
<http://www.arso.org/lettrefad2.htm>

Tamek on Hunger Strike; human rights protests spread (ARSO)

While much of the UK tucked into Christmas dinners, imprisoned human rights activist Ali-Salem Tamek was on hunger strike to protest at human rights abuses by the Moroccan regime and at the poor conditions of his detention. His protest met with some success, in that he was granted an individual cell on 26th December. Judged by Amnesty International to be a prisoner of conscience, Tamek was last autumn sentenced to 2 years imprisonment for threatening state security, on the basis of his belief in Western Sahara's right to independence and statements from other activists allegedly extracted under torture. He can be written to at this address:

Ali-Salem Tamek, No d'écrou 86401,
Hay M No 01 ch 43, Prison de Salé, Rabat - MOROCCO.

Interviews with him have appeared recently in two independent Moroccan

weeklies (Al-ayam and Annahar), and he was described as a political prisoner on the Moroccan TV programme "The Press has its Opinion". Sit-ins to protest at the holding of political prisoners have recently been held in the cities of Assa (Southern Morocco) and Rabat.

News

Human Rights (arso)

Ali Salem Tamek received a visit from the president of the Moroccan prison examiners, Mr Abderrahim Jamai, to discuss conditions of imprisonment, and on January 6th by a delegation from the Ministry of Justice to discussions about conditions and Tamek's claims.....

Students began a sit-in outside the prison management headquarters in Rabat to protest the arrest and sentencing of 16 year old Sidi Heiba Hbibi, a Saharawi shepherd accused of laying a landmine on the road from Tan-Tan to Smara.

Imprisoned members of the Sahara branch of the Forum of Truth and Justice began a 48-hour hunger strike on Jan 13th in protest of the status of political prisoners and to obtain improvements in visiting rights.

An action committee has been set up for the release of Ali Salem Tamek and all Saharawi political prisoners. The secretariat consists of former political prisoners and members of Tamek's family. Mohamed Daddach, given his freedom after 24 years, was appointed president of honour.

US-Morocco free trade talks bring French rebuke for Rabat (arso, agencies)

During his visit to Morocco, French deputy minister for external trade François Loos suggested that Morocco would have to choose between closer economic links with the US and the EU. Rabat and Washington have been discussing a free-trade agreement for some time, and negotiations aimed at closing the deal are due to open in Washington on 21st January. The US currently has such agreements with just four countries: Canada and Mexico under NAFTA, Jordan, and Israel.

"It is difficult for Morocco to be a privileged partner of the European Union (EU) and to conclude at the same time a zone of free-exchange with the United States" he said, adding "we cannot aim for two things which are incompatible". These two things might be the two

economic agreements; or maybe he means the US deal and the continuation of France's leading role in Morocco's affairs?

Overview: Baker returns empty-handed – which way now?

James Baker III's third visit to the Maghreb as Kofi Annan's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara ended last Friday in Nouakchott, Mauritania. Physically he may be in Houston but politically he's stuck in the sand, for although he has allowed until 1st March for comments from the parties (with MINURSO's mandate likely to be extended until the end of that month), the disappointment of POLISARIO Front officials with his latest proposals is already plain.

His first voyage set in train the discussions which produced the Houston Accords of 1997. This put the voter identification process back on track, and led directly to the publication of the provisional voter list of 86,000 people three years later. It brought a significant step forward towards a just solution to the Western Sahara conflict.

The Moroccan response to the publication of the list was to lodge appeals in the name of 130,000 potential voters. At the time, in the year 2000, Kofi Annan said that this marked a potentially fatal blow to the Settlement Plan because it could take two years to process all those appeals, and such a delay was unthinkable! Something else would have to be tried.

Baker's second visit was in 2001, when he brought that "something else", the "Draft Framework Agreement", which he admitted was in fact a Moroccan-written proposal which he had "polished". This was rejected by the POLISARIO Front because it would have legalised the Moroccan invasion, left the Saharawi population under the "protection" of the Moroccan security services, scrapped the years of work on the existing voter list and allowed Morocco to import voters to win the referendum. It has been repeatedly rejected as unworkable by the UN Security Council.

Now in 2003, amid rumours that Western Sahara is becoming something of an embarrassment to him, Mr Baker has tried again. Unfortunately, while the full details of the proposals have not been made public, Saharawi sources have indicated that they amount to little more than a "thinly-veiled" re-hash of the "Draft Framework Agreement". The basic outline is described as a "Five year period of autonomy within Morocco at the end of which the future of the territory will be decided through a referendum, the electorate for which will be 65% Moroccan settlers" (SPS).

Moroccan Foreign Minister Mohamed Benaissa unsurprisingly said that Rabat would examine these proposals "in a constructive spirit" ("Liberation", Morocco, 16th Jan.). Mohamed Sidati, a leading POLISARIO official, commented that "It is very clear now, the complicity between Baker, France and Morocco". The suggestion is that Baker backs France and Morocco, the neo-colonial master and its aggressor client, to "solve" the issue.

This would mean a continuation of the slow diplomatic war of attrition, in which the Saharawis are quietly swindled out of their democratic rights under the UN banner while the sights of the headline-writers are trained elsewhere. But this reckons without the Saharawis' desperate resolve not to be accept being robbed. Small wonder that Algerian newspaper "Le Soir" last week wrote: "To arms, then, Saharawis, and good luck!" Let us hope that the world finds peaceful ways of persuading Rabat to accept justice before this happens. The conflict will not go away until the Saharawis get a free and fair chance to choose independence.

More info, quotations etc. : <http://www.spsrasd.info/sps-180103.html> ; Financial Times 20th Jan,

<http://news.ft.com/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=FT.com/StoryFT/FullStory&c=StoryFT&cid=1042490924772> ; “Mission Possible”,
<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/2003/Jan03/Fadel.htm>

News

UN extends MINURSO until 31st March

As widely predicted, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of MINURSO until 31st March 2003 to allow time for the parties to consider James Baker's latest proposals. The new deadlines are **1st March** – comments from the parties; **16th March** – Secretary-General's report; **31st March** – Security Council vote.

Knife Attack on Ali-Salem Tamek in prison

An imprisoned drug-trafficker attempted to stab Ali-Salem Tamek and beat him with an iron bar, shouting “The Sahara is Moroccan, long live Mohamed VI”. Tamek was rescued by fellow prisoners, but, as a political detainee with no history of violence, one has to ask if the Moroccan authorities are deliberately keeping him in with violent criminals, either as punishment or in the hope that a “tragic accident” will eliminate him. Tamek has continued to be a thorn in the side of the Moroccan regime from within prison: Moroccan Arabic daily An-Nahar has published his report on conditions inside Inzegane prison, and he has written letters to Moroccan government officials and UN Envoy James Baker from his cell.

Global Solidarity with the Saharawi struggle

i) Assa (southern Morocco) & Boujdour (Western Sahara)

The Saharawi community of Assa, a town in Southern Morocco, marked New Year's Day with an action day on Saharawi political prisoners. Action committees for the release of Ali-Salem Tamek and all political prisoners have been formed in Assa and Boujdour: contact them on comiteaction@caramail.com. Previously, political party, trade union and Amazigh cultural associations in Assa had published a statement of solidarity with Ali-Salem Tamek, calling for his immediate release. Local representatives of these institutions reiterated their solidarity with Tamek in the face of rebukes from their national leadership and the Moroccan provincial authorities.

ii) Agadir (Morocco) – three day exhibition (16th-18th January)

Saharawi university students organised three days on the human rights situation in Western Sahara. The debates ranged beyond human rights abuses to include the history of the conflict and the struggle for Saharawi self-determination.

(ARSO correspondents)

iii) Rome/Socialist International

Meeting in Rome on 20-21st January, the Socialist International adopted a resolution stating that “a just and lasting solution to the Western Sahara conflict, can only be found by assuring to the Saharawi people the exercising of the right to self determination in accordance with the terms of the UN Peace Plan and the Houston Agreement.” It also supports the UN and international law, and calls for the release of “all military and civilian prisoners.” This is particularly welcome given the controversy over last year's meeting of the Socialist International in Casablanca, Morocco, to which the POLISARIO Front was excluded. Happily, it seems this was merely a makhzen-produced “blip” in the history of the Socialist International's support for the Saharawi people.

iv) Spain – Algiers, Paris, Porto Alegre...

The last two weeks have also seen the establishment of an Algerian-Spanish foundation of solidarity with the Saharawi people, a debate in the French National Assembly around the

theme "Western Sahara, a question of unresolved decolonisation, what is at stake?" and at the World Civil Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil a workshop "Western Sahara: over a century of struggle against imperialism" which condemned the Moroccan government's prevention of the referendum of self-determination, exploitation of Western Sahara's natural resources, and repression and systematic human rights abuses in the occupied territories.(ARSO)

Spain – Morocco: Ambassadors return, but differences remain

Media across Europe announced the end of "15 months of crisis" as Spain and Morocco agreed to resume full diplomatic relations with the return of their ambassadors. Morocco withdrew its ambassador in Madrid in November 2001 following disputes over clandestine immigration across the Straits of Gibraltar: the Spanish ambassador in Rabat was recalled in July 2002 as a result of Morocco's Parsley Island adventure.

It makes sense for neighbours to talk to each other, and undoubtedly the public atmosphere has calmed since last summer: so the ambassadors have returned. The Moroccan press have tried to hype up the event as the beginning of an era which will see Spain lessening its support for Saharawi self-determination. But Reuters noted that, while Morocco has to some extent clamped down on people-trafficking across the Straits, Spain does not appear to have changed its stance on any of the issues dividing the two countries – including Western Sahara. Indeed, according to various press sources, at a recent meeting in Madrid Spanish Foreign Minister Ana Palacio and her Russian counterpart both agreed they should continue supporting Saharawi self-determination in the Security Council. (*MAP, L'economiste-maroc, Le Monde, Reuters*)

Human Rights - New website

BIRDHSO, the Swiss-based International Bureau for the Respect of Human Rights in Western Sahara, is now online at www.birdhso.org. This French language site contains reports of human-rights observers' reports and much more, including photos taken inside Moroccan prisons!

Overview: a question of responsibility

"... every possible option has been presented to the parties aimed at reaching a solution. Obviously, the responsibility for a positive culmination of these efforts must now rest solely with the parties." (UN Secretary-General's Report on Western Sahara, S/2003/59, 16th January 2003).

The Saharan stalemate seems to be making Kofi Annan and James Baker grumpy. They should imagine how the Saharawi feel on finding that the latest UN plan is indeed the rejected Framework Agreement in new clothes. Superficially major changes in which of the settlers can vote in a referendum on the future of Western Sahara disguise the fact that there will still be an in-built majority of voters who are - in a literal, financial sense - sponsored by the Moroccan government. This is the heart of the problem – when no-one believes there are "floating voters", the electoral roll is all. And thus to choose a formula for determining it is to pick sides.

Picking the Moroccan side is not a "possible option" because the Saharawis won't go away, nor return to Moroccan rule with its ongoing human rights abuses. Their need for self-determination is greater than Rabat's need to occupy Western Sahara. But picking the

Saharawi side and then waiting to see if Rabat's gangsters will do the right thing produces nothing but frustration for the Saharawi people. In fact, as long as the *makhzen* maintain their grip on Morocco, there are no "possible options" for resolving the conflict without international pressure.

After all, if your neighbours forced you out of your house at gunpoint, you would expect the authorities, or indeed the rest of the community, to do something more robust than merely "present the possible options". International law calls for Saharawi self-determination, so responsibility for a "positive culmination" lies with the "international community" too. We have many "possible options" before us to put pressure on the aggressor (see next issue): the Saharawi have their willingness to fight for their freedom. They must not be left to die doing the job we should have done years ago.

News

French NGOs' report slams conditions under Moroccan occupation

The report of the Fondation France Libertés and AFASPA mission, who travelled to Western Sahara from 28th October to 5th November 2002 on a mission to investigate the civil, political, socio-economic and cultural rights of the Saharawis and the economic exploitation of the Western Sahara, was published last week.

It states that testimonies gathered confirm Morocco's violation of International Humanitarian Law from 1975, and that many of the Moroccan security forces that committed acts of torture still hold their posts or have been promoted. The report confirms that the freedoms of the Saharawi are systematically suppressed and human rights activists subject to economic sanctions, heavy prison sentences and fines.

As for the economic situation, the report found that phosphates in the territory are being extracted in disregard of the interests of the Saharawi. It is claimed that the resources exploited are for the benefit of Moroccan politicians and the military (unsurprisingly) - but also serve the interests of Spain, the economic partner of Morocco in the Western Sahara.

Full details in French from: www.france-libertes.fr or www.afaspa.org

Human Rights: dates for your diary (ARSO, BIRDHSO)

The dates of the trials of 7 Saharawi prisoners of conscience held in the black prison of El Ayoun have been fixed: on 26 February 2003 - Moussaoui Ahmed; on 12 March - Bazeid Salek, Moussamih Baba, Bourhil Mohamed Lamine, Bougrain Haddi; on 19 March - Sbaai Aahmed; and on 26 March - Essaya Ezzeine (trial postponed from 5th February). They can be written to at "Prison Civile, Laayoune, Sahara Morocco"...

Release of 100 Moroccan POWs (ARSO, AFP)

The POLISARIO Front announced its decision to release 100 Moroccan prisoners of war to mark the day of Eid-al-Adha. The decision was welcomed by William Lacy Swing, the chief of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), who expressed his hope for the release of all remaining prisoners of war and called on the parties to continue to cooperate with the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (ICRC) to uncover the fate of all those unaccounted for since the beginning of the conflict. The Spanish government expressed satisfaction and a belief that the gesture would work towards creating a climate of trust and dialogue between the parties.

Norwegian Government condemns oil exploration in Western Sahara (ARSO, Upstream Online)

At a conference on social responsibility and ethical investment Norwegian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Vidar Helgesen openly criticised Norwegian company **TGS-Nopec** over its arrangements for gathering seismic data off the territory of Western Sahara. Helgesen said that the TGS-Nopec saga was an example of a "difficult and uncomfortable investment in a problematic area". TGS-Nopec has now completed 15,000 kilometres of deep-water 2D seismic surveys for oil giants Kerr-McGee and TotalFinaElf and the results will be ready for sale within four months.

The involvement of TGS in an operation whose legality has been contested has stirred disapproval in Norway, and several businesses have divested from the company thanks to an ongoing campaign by the Norwegian Support Committee for the Western Sahara, most recently Sweden's Banco Funds and Norwegian newspaper Bergens Tidende. Although UN legal advisor Hans Correll made the distinction between 'exploring' for oil and 'exploitation', Norway's foreign secretary said that in questions of sovereignty, Norway's position is that there is no distinction.

Humanitarian Crisis (ARSO, Sahara Update)

The UN World Food Programme and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees warned of a possible humanitarian crisis facing 1.2 million refugees in Africa due to lack of funding to meet refugee needs. Food for the more than 155,000 Saharawi refugees in SW Algeria is expected to run out in April unless new donations are received. According to a report undertaken by Refugees International the UNHCR budget for the Saharawi refugee camps was \$4.6 million in 2002 yet they had received commitments totalling only \$1.6 million as of October 2002.

Overview: offers the *makhzen* can't refuse?

It is official that the government of Morocco is opposed to the plan which formed the basis of the ceasefire in 1991 and the "free and fair expression of the will of the people of Western Sahara" as called for by the International Court of Justice in 1975 before the Green March. One response to this has been to try and put together a "compromise" which both sides can agree to – but the two sides' mutually exclusive objectives make this very difficult. Another response, then, is to put pressure on Morocco to accept the implementation of the plan.

The UK government [like the Dutch...] seems reluctant to confront Morocco, preferring to work with the regime to encourage reform. Such politeness in international affairs may be commendable, but is it effective in this case? It seems instead to have produced a hardening of Morocco's position against the referendum, masked by a softening on promises of "autonomy" which the Saharawis are understandably unwilling to trust. Maybe it's time to burst the *makhzen*'s bubble.

There are many ways of putting pressure on, from "targeted sanctions" - how about an indefinite embargo on shopping trips to Paris for the Moroccan elite? - to more conventional measures, e.g. a long overdue ban on importing phosphates mined at Boucraa. In fact, both Britain and the US are pursuing increased trade with Morocco, and one would expect this to give the rich Western countries some leverage. (It certainly has made France jealous.) Couldn't the carrot of trade preferences be conditional on respect for UN resolutions and international law? This isn't a matter of threatening sanctions, after all, rather of offering rewards.

The point is it might not take much pressure, because the *makhzen* don't get much directly from Western Sahara. Moroccan generals could continue people-trafficking to the Canaries

from Tan-Tan in Morocco: it doesn't have to be done from El Ayoun. The Moroccan mafia grows all its drugs in the North, they won't mind losing the "southern provinces".

The real problem for the regime is that 28 years corruption and authoritarian politics have left them with precious little to justify their continuing rule other than nationalist rhetoric, much of which has been concerned with Western Sahara. But without Western Sahara, they might have to do something about literacy, health, sanitation etc in Morocco to salvage their political legitimacy. A little pressure for Saharawi independence could bring real benefits for Moroccans too.